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Commentary on "The Indiscriminate State of Social Class Measurement"

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One of the most difficult tasks of the research sociologist is putting into operation the concepts that are widely discussed in the literature. More specifically, empirical research into "class," "status," or "social class" is confounded by the resort to authority. In the present instance, obeisance is paid to two "founding fathers"—Karl Marx and Max Weber. Although both made global statements about stratification and neither made field studies of the structure of the societies they wrote about, these "ancestors" are a frame of reference for many contemporary sociologists. From the viewpoint of this correspondent, two more crucial issues are (1) the nature of social differentiation in extant societies and (2) its appropriate reflection in behavioral science publications.

Haug and Sussman have focused their attention upon the procedures two sociologists developed for placing individuals and household groups in the social structure of contemporary communities, primarily in the United States of America in the middle third of the twentieth century. Since the Duncan (1961a; 1961b) and Hollingshead (1957) indexes were constructed independently, my comments will be confined largely to the development of the *Two Factor Index of Social Position.*

A statement of the research that gave rise to this index is appropriate here, particularly because Haug and Sussman have ignored this dimension of the problem in their paper. What is of greater interest is that they do not present a single bibliographical citation to the research that I published on social differentiation and stratification in the twenty years that preceded the publication of the *Two Factor Index of Social Position.*

I became interested in the structure of contemporary societies during the summer of 1931 when I made a field trip to British Columbia, Canada, and observed the behavior of Doukhobors in their relations with one another and with other Canadians. During a six-week period, I observed that the Doukhobors were separated from the non-Doukhobors primarily by ethnic identification. Stated in structural terms, the two portions of the community's population I was studying were divided by vertical lines of cleavage, and within both divisions there were horizontal lines of cleavage. In the non-Doukhobor segment of the community, the factors that appeared to stratify the population were wealth or lack of it, formal education, occupation, and ethnic origin. There was less stratification among the Doukhobors than among the non-Doukhobors. Ideologically, the Doukhobors talked of equality—"We are all Doukhobors"—but they showed deference to certain families, while other families were denigrated.

Between 1933 and 1942, I carried out empirical studies of differentiation in several rural communities in the Middle West. The best known of these studies is *Elmtown's Youth* (1949). In these communities, one could observe the behavior of individuals in the social structure. Direct observation of the behavior of persons and groups of persons in their relations with one another was supplemented by systematic interviews with residents about the prestige structure of the community. This technique worked well in established small communities, all of which supported a population of less than *10,000.* In larger communities another technique was indicated.

When I began my studies of social differentiation in the New Haven community in 1947, I was fortunate in having available to me the results of a series of studies that had been carried out by anthropologists, social psychologists, and sociologists in the Institue of Human Relations, Yale University. These studies were primarily concerned with the social and ecological structures of the New Haven population. They showed that each racial or ethnic group was a relatively self-contained hierarchy. Within a particular hierarchy, whether it was composed of Irish, Italian, German, Negro, or Old Yankee families, the social structure was stratified. This was demonstrated further in my study of marriages in the community. An analysis of marriages in New Haven during 1948, 1949, and 1950 revealed that in some eight out of ten marriages both spouses came from the same ethnic or racial group, and within the ethnic or racial hierarchy both the husband and the wife in approximately nine marriages out of ten belonged to the same socioeconomic stratum. When marital partners came from different hierarchies, that is married across ethnic lines, *93* percent belonged to the same stratum in the socioeconomic structure of the community.

In 1950, I began, with Fredrick C. Redlich, M.D., currently Dean of the School of Medicine, Yale University, a large-scale study of interrelations between social stratification and the care mentally ill members of the community were receiving from psychiatric agencies in the New Haven area. To test a key hypothesis in this research we needed to determine placement of individuals in the social structure. This was done in two ways: (1) Jerome K. Myers, now Professor of Sociology, Yale University, and I, first made a detailed study of differentiation in the New Haven community. We found that the social structure

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was essentially what I had envisioned in my study of the selection of marriage mates. (2) Then a systematic sample was drawn of *5* percent of the households in the community. There were *3,559* households in this sample. Each household was interviewed in 1951 with a schedule of questions on the size of the household, the age and sex of its members, the occupation of the head of the household and any other members who were in the labor force, the years of school the adult members had completed, marital status, religious identification and participation, reading habits, recreations, and so forth.

Without going into detail, it will suffice to say that a *three* factor index of social position was developed to enable the research group to stratify the households in the sample. The three factors used were (1) area of residence in the community, (2) occupation of the head of the household, and (3) years of school completed by the head of the household. Information on these items was easily gathered in a field interview: each household lives somewhere; its adult head has some occupational identity; and he or she has a measurable amount of schooling. Fortunately, a large amount of work had been done on the evaluation of residential areas in New Haven by Maurice R. Davie in earlier years. Davie had scaled each residence in the city of New Haven on a *6*-point scale, *1* being the best and *6* being the worst. Davie's technique was used by Myers to bring the data up to date and to evaluate residences in the suburban towns in the same way Davie had for the city of New Haven.

The occupation of the head of the household was rated on a *7*-point scale, a modification of the scale developed by Alba Edwards (1938) when he was employed by the Bureau of the Census. The years of school completed were graded on a *7*-point scale. The *Three Factor Index of Social Position* graded each item—residence, occupation, and education—separately. Each item was given a scale score that had been determined by multiple correlation and regression. The details of these procedures are contained in Appendices Two and Three of *Social Class and Mental Illness* (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958), so I will not repeat them here.

In September 1952, I read a paper on this study during the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. It was published in April 1953. Shortly afterwards, I began to receive requests from sociologists, social workers, social psychologists, and a few psychiatrists for copies of the detailed procedures we had used to stratify the *5* percent sample of households and the psychiatric patients in the psychiatric census. Although we believed that the *Three Factor Index of Social Position* worked very well in New Haven, we realized that, before it could be used in a similar urban community, that community would have to be mapped in detail by the same procedures Davie and Myers had used in New Haven—a major research project in itself and a slow, costly procedure.

To avoid this problem, I decided to reanalyze the data we had accumulated on the *3,559* households included in our *5* percent sample. New multiple correlations and regressions were run. We found that the coefficient of multiple correlation between judged class position and occupation and education of the head of the household was *.975*. This finding revealed that the residential scale contributed very little to the determination of estimated class position. Therefore, the residential scale was dropped. The data were then analyzed to determine the appropriate weights for the occupation and years of schooling of the head of the household. The regression equation indicated that occupation should be assigned a weight of *7* and years of school completed (education) should be assigned a weight of *4*. Thus, the *Two Factor Index of Social Position* came into being. It *was* and *is* a spin-off from the study of the social structure in the New Haven community. It was developed specifically for use in this community. For better or worse, as Haug and Sussman point out, it has "caught on" and was widely used in field studies of one kind or another in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

The occupations and businesses listed in the occupational scale are those we encountered among heads of households in the *5* percent sample. No effort was made to have the oc-

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cupational scale representative of all occupations extant in the United States. That there are a few unusual occupations listed is not surprising. Haug and Sussman call attention to some occupations they consider "rare or disappearing"—wine bottler, rope splicer, hostler-railroad conductor—and to some new and expanding occupations—computer programmer, airline stewardess, guidance counselor, professional athlete, and labor official. In regard to the unusual or disappearing occupation, one must realize that New Haven is a seaport and rail center; it also has a large population of Italian-Americans. There are several companies in the community that specialize in buying wines in large barrels and vats and bottling them for retail sales; the wine bottlers in our sample were, and probably still are, employed in these processing centers. The rope splicers work on and around the New Haven docks. The hostlers work mainly in the railroad yards and repair shops taking care of locomotives. (The railroad is still carrying passengers, and it employs conductors.) If a comparable study were made today, I would be surprised to find many representatives of the "new occupations" who were heads of households, particularly airline stewardesses.

The problem of allocation of a given individual's occupation to a particular place on the economic scale is occasionally difficult. Haug and Sussman puzzle over why a correction officer was assigned a rating of *2* while a policeman rated *5*. This particular correction officer was a professional social worker attached to the juvenile court. He held a Master of Science degree from a recognized school of social work. Policemen were rated *5* because they are trained men and were generally regarded in the community as skilled municipal employees. Haug and Sussman raise the question of where a prison guard would be placed on the Hollingshead scale. The answer is if the guard was trained for his work he would be rated *5*.

The occupational lists *are* incomplete. No claim has ever been made by me that they are complete, even for the New Haven community in 1951. I am not surprised that Haug and Sussman had to develop a supplementary list in their research. If we had drawn a different sample in New Haven at that time and interviewed household members, we would probably have found a number of occupations that were not drawn in the first sample. I agree that an optimal listing of occupations should include a wider range than we found in the New Haven community; also, the list should be brought up to date for the time the research is or was done. In the present instance, reference to the *1970 Census of Occupations* would very likely be the best and most complete source.

On the point of ordering occupations from the perspective of their prestige in American society, Hodge and his associates (1966) in the early 1960s concluded that "there have been no substantial changes in occupational prestige in the United States since 1925."

The educational scale is broadly representative of the gradations of schooling in American society. Haug and Sussman are not concerned about this point; their argument is centered on the effects of education on the social position score of a person whose occupation and education are not congruent with the expectations many Americans have of the interdependence of education and occupation. There is a relationship between these two factors, as Haug and Sussman concede, but there are also differences. It is these differences that concern me. I am not upset because there are differences between the years of school some adults have completed and their present occupational positions in the labor force. This incongruity does have an effect on their social lives and, as I express it in the *Two Factor Index of Social Position*, on their position in the status structure. I maintain that education makes a difference in the life style of adults, and it does have an effect on one's class position.

Haug and Sussman emphasize the role of age in educational attainment, and they argue that the educational levels of Americans are changing to such an extent that age confounds the assignment of class position between two generations. They do not furnish data to support this contention. On the other hand, Jencks and Riesman (1968:81) have studied this problem and they point out: "The best available data suggest that a man's overall chances

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of improving on his father's position on the education ladder has [sic] not changed significantly over the last forty years."

The "low" correlation ($r = .74$) between the Hollingshead and Duncan indexes is not surprising. The two indexes are constructed in two different ways. Hollingshead's *Two Factor Index of Social Position* utilized occupation and education as the appropriate indicators in the determination of class position in the metropolitan community centered in New Haven, Connecticut. Duncan's *Socioeconomic Index* uses occupation, education, and income but scores them differently from Hollingshead. When the two indexes are thrown into a correlation matrix, the result is less than a perfect match.

A critical issue that is not raised by Haug and Sussman revolves around validity: do the procedures utilized by sociologists interested in the measurement of "status" or "social class" adequately reflect the distribution of persons and groups of persons in the inequality structure characteristic of communities in the United States? This question, in my opinion, is more important than Haug and Sussman's findings that the two indexes are not completely congruent.

I am in agreement with Haug and Sussman that a careful appraisal of the definitions and measurements of occupational and educational inequalities by sociologists and other behavioral scientists is of crucial importance in the analysis of the status structure of American society. I am not in agreement with their recommendation that the American Sociological Association mount a discipline-wide effort to solve the issues they raise in this paper. Such a commission would likely take on the aura of an "Establishment." In the long run, its recommendations might be as disfunctional for the further development of sociology as a behavioral science as the present tendency to assume Marx and Weber had "divine insight" into the real nature of society. To do so is to reify the ghosts of two "sacred cows" or perhaps we should say two "old bulls."

My position is that the efforts of individual scholars or a small group of scholars are more likely to result in the development of concepts relative to social differentiation in a society, or across societal lines, and the optimal way to measure it than an institutionalized commission. Stratification is only one dimension of the large issue of social differentiation in contemporary societies all over the planet Earth.

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